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Perspectives

A MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FRATERNITY/SORORITY ADVISORS

CO-OPTING A KING

INTER/NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS' USE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ON SOCIAL MEDIA

aPerspectives

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FROM THE EDITORS

About two years ago now, we experienced an abrupt shift in how we lived and interacted with the world around us. That shift, in some ways, was significantly easier than the gradual emergence we've been living ever since. Then, many decisions were made for us; for most fraternity/sorority professionals, work was done from home, behind a computer screen, professional up top while wearing slippers and sweatpants below (the "professional mullet"). Our families were either in that very same room balancing competing virtual meeting and school schedules, or they were what felt like millions of miles away behind coordinated FaceTime and Zoom dates. Similar can be said with our relationships with friends and colleagues.

Now, and slowly over the past year or so, our lives have not been so prescribed. We've had to make more individual decisions on what is "worth it," opposed to listening to the mandates of our state or county. Do I volunteer to staff the in-person graduation celebration? Do I fly to a different state to visit a friend? Do I attend the rescheduled in-person conference or convention? As we have gotten more comfortable making these decisions, they start to become a little easier. We know where we personally draw the lines, and in what spaces we are willing to risk our health or the health of others.

This, we have seen, has also resulted in some different decision making in how we spend our time, and with whom. Regardless of risk involved, individuals are making different decisions about who gets their energy and attention, and those decisions are also starting to come easier. Am I obligated to be at the fraternity council meeting at 8pm? Am I obligated to stay at a friend's party when I would rather read a book at home? Am I obligated to spend a holiday with family members who are detrimental to my mental health? These questions, and others, have us reflecting on our identity as professionals, parents, siblings, friends, and humans: What is important to me, and how do I surround myself with that as much as I am able?

Of course, the ability to choose where and how we spend our energy is tied to privilege and power. Permission to hold true to our identities while also feeling safe and affirmed is not afforded to all people everywhere, and it would be inappropriate for us to assume these decisions do not come without stress, conflict, or heartache. But as we continue to focus on who we are as individuals, we gain clarity on when we may be able to expand the spaces in which we can be our authentic selves, and minimize, as much as possible, the spaces in which we cannot.

This approach to decision making and self-preservation is not a new concept. Our colleagues of color, LGTBQIA+ folx, neurodiverse peers, and many others have navigated this balance much longer than others of us. Does this relationship/environment/activity value my humanity, or does it not? Can I remove myself, or not? How can I remain as true to myself as possible while protecting my basic needs and safety?

These are the questions, ultimately, we now wrestle with. We would argue the last year has provided the opportunity for all of us to be a little more unapologetic in our responses. As we continue to navigate the ever-changing landscapes in the communities of which we are a part, let's be reminded that we are all entering with likely some new-found confidence in our ability to be selfish, and it is a good thing.

Tyler Havens & Emilie Dye
AFA Perspectives Editors

Letter from the President

Chris Graham

Hello AFA,

So much has changed since our last edition of *Perspectives*. As we continue to process how much our world and our work continues to change, I hope we balance that process with grace, data, diverse perspectives and sound judgement.

I get asked all the time about what it has been like to serve as president of AFA. Specifically, I get asked what it has been like to serve during a pandemic, global crisis and so many national challenges related to justice, identity, and unprecedented change. Honestly, it has been challenging, yet so rewarding. I'm an internal optimist. I believe it is hard to be aware of the world around me and not be grateful and thankful. I make the choice to be hopeful about the possibility of what is yet to come.

In my inaugural presidential address, I shared one of my favorite quotes by former President Barack Obama. President Obama shared, "Hope is not blind optimism. It's not ignoring the enormity of the task ahead or the roadblocks that stand in our path. It's not sitting on the sidelines or shirking from a fight. Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it. Hope is the belief that destiny will not be written for us, but by us, by the men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be."

We know that things will continue to change, and through so many of those changes we will be faced with some difficult moments. I invite you to join me in choosing to hope and courageously contributing to this Association and the greater higher education community with our leadership, expertise and talent.

My best,

Chris Graham

SAVE THE DATE

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What's Your Perspective?

Join us on social media to share your perspective on the topics included in this issue of *Perspectives*.

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Perspectives

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I WILL FIND BALANCE:

WHAT CLOUDS MY BRAIN AS A MID-PROFESSIONAL

JANISE V. SPRUIELL

"I can't keep doing this," I remember saying clearly to myself. It was the end of what seemed to be one of the most challenging weeks of my career. My community was in shambles, I felt as though I needed to fix it, none of my ideas were working, and nothing was going right. "I can't keep doing this." At that moment, I felt as if I was missing the mark. Doubting my ability to do my job well was non-stop. I was exhausted. My life was my job. I could not focus on anything but work. I never felt more unsure of myself professionally than at that moment. "I can't keep doing this," was the cry for help to myself.

I can't keep working late, multiple nights a week and showing up fully the next morning. I can't keep being a second president to chapters and councils when I am their advisor. I can't keep solving all their problems. I can't continue to keep quiet and not advocate for what I need. I can't keep putting my work before me. "I can't keep doing this." That day, I made the decision I had to find balance. I was on the verge of burnout, but I was not ready to call it quits. There was nothing anyone else could do for me. I sat through all the AFA and NASPA sessions about burnout. I remember young professionals coming and speaking to the first-year grad students about work life balance. I saw all the social media posts about what to do and what not to do to avoid burnout. But there I was. "I can't keep doing this."

I started off in residence life then transitioned into fraternity/sorority life. If you have spent more than one day in either area, you know that balance between your work, your commitments, your energy, and your life is hard to achieve. Balancing the demands of my job, taking care of myself, laying down roots in a city I love, figuring out who I was beyond being a grad student, and dealing with imposter syndrome was overwhelming at times. I threw myself into my job. I wanted to be the absolute best, but at what cost? I was losing myself. This is not what I envisioned on the first day of my graduate work. My whole identity became my job. The hard working, at every late program and meeting, stressing about everything new professional. That was my identity. There I was, three years into my career finally realizing I needed to find a balance if I was going to make it.

Even though that experience with my community was one of my hardest professional moments, I never imagined I would get to a point where I would not be able to do this anymore. I believe it helped me to be able to continue and thrive (most days) in my field. I did not realize it at the time, but that moment completely changed my approach to work. I dusted off those old notes about burnout. Looked at those Instagram posts I saved and started to craft what balance meant for me. I started to set my boundaries. The boundaries came by speaking up for myself and advocating for what I needed. I started pausing before rushing to fix every issue, putting down what was not mine to pick up in the first place. I started prioritizing moments that gave me calmness and picking up hobbies that fell to the side. And my favorite: putting my phone on do not disturb. I needed to find balance, and that is exactly what I did.

Fraternity/sorority life is exhausting. We are expected to be legal experts, counselors, advocates, cheerleaders, consultants, financial advisors, and the list goes on. But when does it become too much? How many times must you get to the end of a hard week and roll right into the next one before you just don't have any more to give. Our students will always need us, our work will always be there, there will always be a crisis, a late-night call, a program that is about to fail. In our field, none of this is going away.

I can't keep solving all their problems.

You must find your balance — I am pleading with you! Now, do not get me wrong. There will be moments where the workload is heavy. Where you are rolling from one week to the next and balance seems impossible. One could argue that every field will have moments. However, there still must be balance. For some, balance may look like getting eight hours of sleep a night, making it to the gym a few days of week, and spending time working on a passion project. For others, it may be prioritizing social time with friends, a standing therapy session, or getting outside for an hour every day. How you decide to re-center and balance yourself is not important. What is important is that at the end of the day and the end of the week, do you feel full?

As a newer professional, you may be reading this and thinking it is easier said than done. In full transparency, it was easier said than done for me too in the beginning. I felt as if I

had everything to prove, I did not have control over my calendar, and I needed to be everything to be considered good enough for my role. After reading this piece, I want you to leave with tangible actions you can take to help you on your quest. Thankfully, for me, over the years I have had some tough moments and wonderful mentors who have helped me get to the point where I can comfortably sit in my balance. This is how I got there.

Start small. If you are already feeling unbalanced between work and your life, adding more may not be the best thing at first. I encourage you to find small moments throughout the day that bring you to your center. The small moments are intended to be just that, small. They should be quick actions you can take allowing you to decompress before moving into the next task. One of my favorite small steps I have taken was shortening my meetings from one hour to 45 minutes. At the end of a heavy meeting day, I was exhausted. I didn't have a moment to catch my breath or regroup before moving into the next meeting. I often had them back-to-back, which did not help. Once I made the decision to shorten my meetings, I instantly could tell the difference. I was able to sit in silence for a moment, make any notes I needed to from the previous meeting, grab water or pop into a colleague's office, and regroup for my next appointment. The most rewarding thing I realized through this shift was that my students did not suffer when I decided to prioritize myself in a very quick and tangible way. We were still able to connect and handle all the crises in their chapter. For others, starting small could be a short walk around the building. One may decide to pay attention to the "Breathe" feature that pops up on your Apple Watch. We have all felt the ding on our wrist and ignored it. Starting small may be a quick affirmation in the morning to call upon balance throughout your day, or even taking 10 minutes to eat your lunch without responding to an email. Starting small will open your capacity to bring on larger acts of balance and ultimately bring you the joy that you deserve.

Find a hobby. I believe in anyone's quest for balance, there must be a hobby or a passion project. I consider myself creative. I am constantly finding and exploring new interests, but once I started working full-time, I lost that part of myself. I got up, went to work, stayed late most days, went back home, and did it all over again. Where was I in this? Where and when was I getting refilled? I was not. Having a hobby or a passion project outside of work will help you get through the hectic moments at work.

It is important to note that everyone may not be able to jump in with a hobby or passion project. Again, meet yourself where you are. The goal of any hobby or passion project is to anchor you outside of your job. It could be a new OrangeTheory Fitness membership, a new book club, a new hiking trail, or a paint by numbers to conquer. Everyone needs a hobby. Ask yourself, what do you like to do outside of work and when was the last time you did it? When things are hectic in your life, what is the one thing that you do that brings you right back to center? If you do not have an answer, then we have some work to do. Having interests that do not involve your job is vital to finding your balance. It is what you do when you need to clear your mind so you can recharge and help find the answer. When you are feeling anxious about the upcoming week, your hobbies and passion projects remind you of you.

Take your paid time off. Leave! Take a mental health day. Sit on your couch and do nothing. Your work will be there when you get back. You owe it to yourself to take some time for yourself and to not feel guilty about it. I am a strong believer that your life is meant for more than work. I recognize not all spaces encourage taking time off and may even actively discourage it. My advice is to plan as much as possible in advance to get you started. Planning gives you the opportunity to prepare for the "busy season." It also allows you to put it on your supervisor's radar in advance to allow them time to review. I also encourage you to discuss expectations with your supervisor which I will dive into more.

Take your email off your primary mobile homescreen. This was one of the best pieces of advice I have received. If you are anything like me, whenever I received a flood of emails, my heart started to race, and I felt this immense pressure to stop what I was doing and answer them right away. Even if it was the weekend. I also felt compelled to always check it just in case. Having my email on the primaryscreen was a constant reminder of work. There was no separation. I started with a trial run to see how moving my email icon out of my immediate view would impact me. Honestly, I did not think it would do anything. I was wrong! I went a whole weekend without having the urge to check my email. Ever since then, I have made it my mission to keep my email on the very last screen on my phone. If I check it, I am making the conscious decision to do so. I encourage you to explore other ways that you can create the separation between work and your personal life.

So far, I have been discussing ways to build balance in a way that is mainly separate from work. However, balance does not have to be a commitment separate from your job. Having systems and boundaries set up within your job will also help with overall balance. To do that, there is one key step that must happen first. Often, we believe we know what the expectation is of us from our supervisor but do we really? We set up our own expectations, but we rarely have a conversation to set a mutual understanding we can hold ourselves to. I had the opportunity to participate in an immersive leadership program where they gave us a prompt to discuss with our supervisor about their expectations of me and what I perceived their expectations were for me. The prompt led us through four questions my supervisor and I answered separately, then together to see how our answers aligned. The questions were:

1. List the expectations for which you are held accountable.
2. How do you know/think you will be measured for success for each expectation?
3. How do you communicate or would like to communicate with your manager about your expectations?
4. How would you communicate or would like to communicate with your manager when you are not in alignment with an expectation?

This conversation allowed me to have a better understanding of what my expectations were. Once I understood what I was being measured on and how, I was better able to assess where my energy and effort needed to go. Based on that conversation, it allowed me to let go of some of the expectations I placed on myself that I was not being assessed on. I would encourage you to expand this conversation to office culture, personal leave, and communication.

Building good systems is another tool that has helped me find balance. They have taken me far. Whether itis a checklist for how to plan a program, keeping track of membership intake, or a filing system. Build them and build them well. Systems allow you to have a reference point and to access what you need efficiently and effectively. When you have confidence that you have done your part, it makes stepping away that much easier.

Build rapport with your colleagues. Who better understands this world than the people right there in it with you? Who better to hold you accountable for taking care of yourself than the folks working alongside you? They will become your sounding board, your mentors, co-conspirators, and your shoulder. My colleagues have carried me through difficult decisions and major projects. Some days, they are the reason I make it through the week.

> Once I understood what I was being measured on and how, I was better able to assess where my energy and effort needed to go.

Everything is not yours to fix. I repeat, everything is not yours to fix. We are inherently fixers and helpers. We want to resolve every problem, overcome every obstacle, and make every program a success. But some of this stuff is not for us to fix. Sometimes, it truly is for that chapter president, council officer, or community to fix. Sometimes the most important thing for you to do is provide reason and be a sounding board. And sometimes it will fail. But even then, at that moment, it was not for you to fix. Your job is to be their advisor. To help, aid beforehand, to ask probing questions, to provide alternatives, and to troubleshoot and point them in the right direction.

In full transparency, during my quest for balance I have wrestled with the perceived expectations of student affairs and fraternity/sorority life. Whether that is how overly committed I need to be or the expectation you must move around the country before getting a job that pays a comfortable wage and the sacrifices that come with that. Or the expectation that passion alone should suffice, or I must volunteer everywhere before being compensated. There were moments where I asked myself, is it time to move on and is it worth it?

If you are anything like me, you have friends or significant others who work outside of education and their lives just seem so much better. They typically make more money, work less hours, and deal with half of the headaches. I have looked at them and asked myself, "Is it time to move on?" But in my quest, I came back to the same phrase, "I must have balance." Even if you decide that this field is not for you, if you do not have your balance, the same struggles will follow you wherever you go.

Balance is not just a concept that floats around in conference program titles. It is a real tangible thing that we can all have. It has taken me years to finally tap into what balance looks like and feels like for me. Guess what, it may change again and that is ok. Everyone deserves joy in work and in life — let your pursuit of balance bring you the joy you need.

Janise V. Spruiell

Janise is fixated with making it make sense for you and striving towards that every day. She believes everyone deserves to live a life that they envision and feels good for them. She also believes that balance is a non-negotiable.

Janise Spruiell is a native of Atlanta, Ga., which holds many of her fondest memories. Janise earned her BS in Education focusing on Career and Technical Education from the University of Georgia. She later earned her M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration from Auburn University. For the past six years, she has used her student development skillset to enhance the experience of students within Residence Life and Fraternity and Sorority Life. Her time within higher education taught her the importance of the full experience and how transformative it can be. Janise has now transitioned into Early Career Development. As a professional, Janise has a thriving interest in helping to create safe and equitable spaces where individuals can tap into their full potential.

In her spare time, Janise enjoys preserving flowers, traveling, and trying new eateries.

FACING THE NEW NORMAL

RE-ENTRY ANXIETY AFTER THE PANDEMIC

ANNALISE SINCLAIR

Relaxation Exercise for Anxiety

Get comfortable in your chair, resting your arms at your side or on the armrests and planting your feet firmly on the ground.

Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears and then roll them down back and down. You may need to repeat this motion until your feel the tension in your shoulders relax.

Release any tension being held in your forehead and jaw. Then close your eyes, if you feel comfortable doing so.

Slowly take a deep breath in through your nose until your lungs are full, hold that breath for 4 seconds, then blow all the air out through your mouth. Repeat this step until you feel your anxiety abating.

The COVID-19 pandemic quickly and abruptly changed nearly every facet of human life. Over the last year and a half, many fraternity/sorority professionals have weathered virtual recruitment processes, Zoom one-on-ones, and "socially distant" social events. We have been challenged to adapt to working from home in a profession that already often blurs the lines of work-life balance. We have navigated furloughs, housing insecurity, homeschooling, and the loss of human life. Consequently, as noted in "The Fear of COVID-19 and Its Role in Preventive Behaviours," many individuals have experienced an increased strain on their mental health.

In a very short period, we experienced tremendous amounts of change which challenged us to adapt quickly and as we looked towards the fall semester, we are being asked to pivot once again at great speed. Now that lockdown restrictions are easing and we can see the light at the end of the tunnel for this pandemic, many people are experiencing some degree of anxiety when considering the idea of returning to "normal." In fact, according to the American Psychological Association's Stress in America report, nearly 50% of Americans report feeling anxious about in-person interactions post-pandemic in a phenomenon now called re-entry anxiety.

It is completely normal to experience anxiety in moments of high stress. In fact, anxiety has an evolutionary function: to help detect and avoid danger. When we experience a threatening situation, our central nervous system kicks into fight or flight mode which may cause an increased heart rate, rapid breathing, sweating, and muscle tension among other symptoms. This physiological response prepares us to tackle whatever danger is present. The re-entry anxiety currently being seen throughout the population can be attributed to the fear of the unknown-our world has changed dramatically and the future seems uncertain.

Re-entry anxiety is to be expected and is perfectly normal. However, it can be uncomfortable and distracting especially if you have never experienced feelings of anxiety before. There are several steps you can take to effectively cope with re-entry anxiety as we move through the fall:

Steps to Ease Re-Entry Anxiety

1. Start small and ease into change, if possible. Jumping straight back to a normal schedule after working-from-home for over a year can be stressful. Many employers are allowing for hybrid models as we prepare for future work, lessening transition anxiety. Take the time you need to slowly adjust to change.

2. Maintain the positive habits you've adopted. Did you start taking a post-lunch walk around the neighborhood that helps you relax in the middle of the work day? Build that time into your day now that you've returned to the office.

3. Embrace the flexibility that technology has afforded us. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the idea that nearly every aspect of our lives move to a virtual platform was unheard of. Now that we know technology can make our jobs easier, we should continue to embrace innovation into the future.

4. Document your feelings and emotions. Journaling, even for just a short period of time every day, can help you better understand how your environment is impacting your mental health and provide clarity during difficult situations.

5. Practice sensible self-care. The pandemic has heightened the necessity of investing in one's mental health. Create a self-care plan that includes getting enough sleep, eating well, and regular exercise. If you are struggling with your mental health, seek professional help from a counselor or therapist. The American Psychological Association provides a free psychologist finder on their website.

As seen in "College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for all Students," college students have overwhelmingly stated that the number one thing they are seeking on a college campus is a sense of belonging. At their core, fraternities and sororities fulfill this need by providing both friendship and purpose. Because students had been, and some continue to be, isolated over the last year and a half that desire for belonging may be heightened. Fraternities and sororities are in a position to enrich the lives of students who are coming of age in one of the most tumultuous moments in recent history. However, in order to best support our students, it is critical for fraternity/sorority professionals to examine how our world has changed and the impact this period of prolonged uncertainty has had on our mental health. Take care of yourself — we need you.

Annalise Sinclair

Annalise Sinclair is a mental health speaker, advocate, and educator with ten years of experience working with college students.

Upon graduating from the University of South Florida, she realized that her intended career track — forensic anthropology — no longer sparked any passion. Reflecting on her experience as a member of Alpha Omicron Pi fraternity, Annalise decided to pursue fraternity/sorority advising as a career and obtained her M.Ed. in higher education administration at Kent State University.

She has worked in a variety of roles on several college campuses and most recently, had the privilege of serving as the only woman on the headquarters staff of a men's fraternity. She is now the owner of her own educational company and speaks to thousands of college students about courage, mental health, and vulnerability. Annalise currently resides in Greenville, South Carolina with her husband, rescue dog, and geriatric cat.

CO-OPTING A KING

INTER/NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS' USE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ON SOCIAL MEDIA

LORAE V. BONAMY | MICHAEL A. GOODMAN. PH.D. | CRYSTAL E. GARCIA. PH.D.

Digital spaces, such as social media, have become staple outlets for organizations, including sororities and fraternities, to communicate specific values and priorities. According to the Pew Research Center, at a broader societal level, some of the most frequent users of social media are adults ages 18-29, which encompasses traditional-aged college students. Users connect with friends, communities, entertainers, and news via sites like Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, and more. Facebook, for example, remains one of the most used sites among adults in the United States. Inter/national sorority/fraternity organizations use social media to disseminate information and influence discourse about topics that are important to them among members, alumnx, campus partners, and communities. More specifically, social media has become a public space where sororities and fraternities can communicate their organization's perspectives on the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in relation to their membership.

According to Caroline Dadas, Ph.D., social media activism, or hashtag activism, is broadly defined as showing support for a cause through likes, shares, and engagement on any social media platform, while potentially obscuring the sociohistorical context. Some scholars consider this form of online activism to be slacktivism and critique it for its non-committal nature and failure to produce lasting change. This method of activism allows people and organizations to symbolically contribute to the discourses surrounding particular topics but does not require that their activism extend beyond the virtual discourse arena.

For most sororities and fraternities, social media is a core element of communication efforts. In a larger study, by Crystal E. Garcia, Ph.D., and Michael A. Goodman, Ph.D., that explored social media messaging by sorority and fraternity inter/national organizations over a four year period of time, it was noted many sororities and fraternities leveraged posts citing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as one way to communicate their social justice engagement. In this piece, we unpack some of these posts and the meanings communicated within them, and we share our perspectives on implications that can be drawn from these in relation to the broader field of sorority/fraternity life.

Study Context

Sororities and fraternities are some of, if not the most prominent, student organizations on college campuses. They mobilize students around important social issues, raise exorbitant amounts of money, and provide people with a sense of home away from home. However, they also perpetuate violence against marginalized populations including sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, and the focus of this piece — anti-Black racism.

Historically and traditionally white sororities and fraternities espouse values like character, integrity, friendship, and community service, yet many of their practices maintain privilege, exclusion, and separation. Through major philanthropic projects, large-scale programs, intra-chapter campaigns, and social media, these chapters paint a picture of the great work they are doing, yet they remain at the center of movements like Abolish Greek Life. Abolish Greek Life contrasts organizations' lived and enacted values with their espoused values and calls them out for a lack of integrity. Like outlined in an article by D-L Stewart, Ph.D., the social media posts analyzed in this piece highlight a disconnect between symbolism and commitment that maintains power discourses in society while appeasing people asking for accountability and justice.

Framework Rationale

To explore social media in the context of Dr. King, we draw from Garcia and Goodman's larger critical discourse analysis. Elsa Simões Lucas Freitas, Ph.D., notes written and visual messages are forms of discourse, so posts were examined from the most followed Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account from 37 sororities and fraternities between August 1, 2016 and June 19, 2020. As such, 112 mentions or images were found of Dr. King across nearly 30,000 posts. To further understand how sororities and fraternities use social media to disseminate and maintain a social justice discourse that diverges from their lived realities, data was examined involving Dr. King using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA).

"The Essential Halliday" notes MCDA is a discursive framework in which the written word is equal in importance to other semiotic resources in a given text — in this case, social media posts. Combined, written text, still or moving images, hashtags, and emojis reflect and influence societal power relations. MCDA allowed us to unpack the lexical properties of the social media posts and the sociopolitical context in which they were written. Inter/national organizations used written words and pictures that functioned to send a message about their positioning as equity-and-justice minded organizations; however, posts seldom achieved this. Using David Machin's, Ph.D., and Andrea Mayr's, Ph.D., seven step process for MCDA, we analyzed how posts were crafted, why writers used certain textual and visual resources to communicate their values, and the potential meaning writers attempted to convey. To explain how these posts related to power discourses in sorority/fraternity life, we considered the original goals of the organizations, the uses of audience engagement,

and the foci of the posts (i.e. Dr. King, racism, and community service).

Themes & Patterns

In analyzing the posts, it was evident that organizations stood to gain something from posting. Hashtag activism is often critiqued because it portrays the author of a text in a positive light for engaging in social justice discourse, but does not require transparency about organizational culture, motives, or socio-historical contexts. Across the 112 mentions or images, we found many organizations used hashtag activism and revised Dr. King's remarks and quotations to appease calls for social justice, distance themselves from the violence of the sorority/fraternity system, and maintain power discourses.

tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now," and, "everybody can be great, because everybody can serve," to set up long-form posts about community service work, recognition, or awards received by the organization.

Other posts appeared obligatory in nature. Some of these posts included just one line of text, an unedited photo of Dr. King, and a quote connected to espoused sorority/fraternity values. These posts used quotes like, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that," and, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." While these quotes are amoral on their own, when we consider them against a backdrop of racial unrest in the U.S., we

...many organizations used hashtag activism and revised Dr. King's remarks and quotations to appease calls for social justice, distance themselves from the violence of the sorority/fraternity system, and maintain power discourses.

Several of the posts included captions reflecting back to the organization and their positive contributions to their community, but they did not acknowledge their opportunities for growth or how they are complicit in oppression and injustice. These posts, like Figure 1, used quotes from Dr. King such as, "We are now faced with the fact that

notice a power discourse replicated in everyday life. For example, one post that was well received in terms of audience engagement simply said, "Let us remember the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," and included the first quote above. These posts, by encouraging "do gooders," place responsibility for social justice on individuals rather

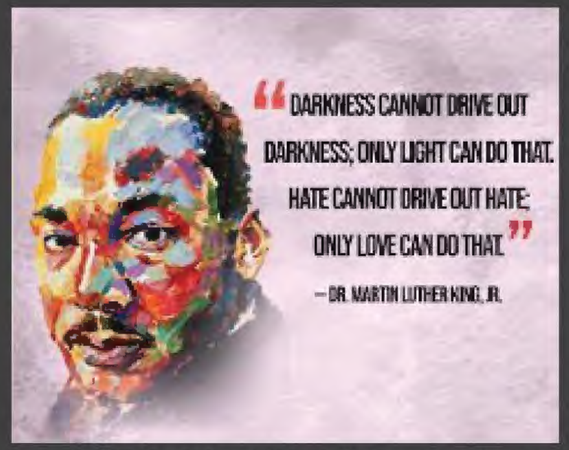
"DARKNESS CANNOT DRIVE OUT DARKNESS; ONLY LIGHT CAN DO THAT. HATE CANNOT DRIVE OUT HATE; ONLY LOVE CAN DO THAT."
– DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Figure 1: MLK, Derek Russell (Note, includes an original painting by Derek Russell, yet the designer of the graphic remains unknown.)

Figure 2: Americorps Social Media Graphic

Figure 3: MLK, Aaron Gilmore

than systems, and ultimately do not influence change.

Several posts, like Figure 2, might be considered inspirational or calls-to-service; they used the textual and visual data to connect with a larger societal discourse about the purpose of MLK Day and provide information about events and opportunities in which members could participate. Though many people acknowledge the day as a time to give back to their communities, a large segment of the U.S. population views it as a break from work or school. In response, these posts connect to the espoused value of community service that exists in all sororities and fraternities, and encourage members to act, by linking to community service organizations and U.S. governmental community service websites. While seemingly practical, the choice to focus solely on community service maintains power because the concept of service is palatable to whiteness, and within the sorority/fraternity context, does not require a critique or defense. D-L Stewart, Ph.D., posits that institutions and organizations use this diversity and inclusion rhetoric to appease constituents and sidestep responsibility for pursuing real change.

Finally, the MCDA methodology revealed the deep impacts of the authors' textual and visual choices, whether deliberate or unintentional. Phrases like, "joins the nation," or, "lives on with our sorority," connect to the espoused value of duty

found in sorority/fraternity life, and they can reify the ahistorical narrative that through community service, organization members are acting as torchbearers of Dr. King's legacy. How the authors write about Dr. King's "life and legacy" is also important to problematize because while this terminology broadly names what organizations are celebrating or memorializing, it is unspecific and unclear, and leaves too much up to interpretation. Unpacking the authors' choices with the visual data further reveals how sorority/fraternity life as a discourse arena contributes to the disconnect between the radical King that lived and the one we remember. As noted in "Discourse Analysis" by Brian Paltridge, Ph.D., many images used in the social media posts have a low reflection of reality, which precludes an accurate representation of historical events or figures. These photos, like the example in Figure 3, are heavily illustrated, designed, or edited to the point that Dr. King no longer exists as a person, but as a concept or a symbolic representation of something else.

Sororities and fraternities are not the only societal organizations who collectively disremember Dr. King; however, they were selected for this project because their presence in higher education is not only historical but also ripe with power, they have an indisputable tie to the college experience. Based on an analysis of the archival data, we believe Dr. King would be standing in opposition to much of what fraternities and

sororities stand for today, yet, still, organizations plaster his image on social media pages in an attempt to align themselves with justice. While he lived, Dr. King was known for civil disobedience, protests, boycotts, and a relentless fight for freedom, but he is posthumously recognized as an avid supporter of community service, kindness, forgiveness, and peace.

Regardless of whether organizations post about Dr. King with good intentions, they often fail to recognize the hypocrisy in appropriating Dr. King's message while reluctant to engage in the activism for which he lived and died. Creating a social media post once or twice per year is the easy way out. As groups post about Dr. King as a beacon for social justice, use Dr. King as a symbol of their commitment and thus an out from doing transformative work, perhaps it is necessary to note and name these communication methods as the bare minimum. Rather than considering posts about Dr. King through name, image, and mis/quote as the gold standard, perhaps, it is only just the bare minimum — a minimum that, still, some organizations are not achieving. To post the bare minimum, co-opts Dr. King's legacy of tireless labor and ultimate sacrifice, and reduces it to a soundbite that does little, if anything, in the way of justice for racially marginalized people.

While seemingly practical, the choice to focus solely on community service maintains power because the concept of service is palatable to whiteness, and within the sorority/fraternity context, does not require a critique or defense.

Final Thoughts & Recommendations

In higher education, sororities and fraternities are widely recognized as spaces that support student development and growth — namely through leadership opportunities, philanthropic engagement, and the promotion of academic success among others. Although these organizations may intend positive experiences and outcomes for student members, there are also negative aspects of sorority/fraternity life such as hazing, forms of discrimination including racism and anti-Blackness specifically, sexual violence and assault, and substance abuse. These outcomes are evidence of a severe disconnect between the aspirational sorority/fraternity community, and who many organizations actually are. To be clear,

Regardless of whether organizations post about Dr. King with good intentions, they often fail to recognize the hypocrisy in appropriating Dr. King's message while reluctant to engage in the activism for which he lived and died.

we are not insinuating referencing Dr. King's work is problematic in and of itself. It becomes problematic when organizations espouse that their organizations align with Dr. King's ideology without deeply considering if that is the case. Before posting, organizations should first question their motivations in doing so. They should consider why they selected a particular message and if its original context is congruent with their framing.

Importantly, if sorority/fraternity organizations are determined to incorporate Dr. King's philosophy into their social justice education, they should commit to teaching their members about the Triple Evils of poverty, militarism, and racism, and their manifestations in the sorority/fraternity system. Instead of engaging in philanthropy out of obligation (which Dr. King might consider charity without love), organizations can educate members about the importance of working as co-conspirators with marginalized and minoritized people. Delta Gamma is an example of an organization who made a commitment to social justice and took a stand, even when they stood to lose support from those who would rather keep their violent history in the past. With their project to contextualize the racism, prejudice, and bigotry woven into the history of their organization, they started a process to make a more inclusive fraternity for all people.

Dr. King believed in allyship, specifically, by white people who "have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to [Black people's] freedom." We encourage historically and traditionally white sororities and fraternities to commit to the work of social justice. We cannot expect to harness the full potential of sorority/fraternity life if we do not address the problematic ways our communities perpetuate harm; furthermore, relying on surface level diversity statements and sentiments embracing equality are not the way to do so. Specifically, posting one-line quotes from Dr. King that ambiguously call for morality and good work are not enough to cultivate change. Rather than rely on lip service alone, sorority/fraternity organizations should examine the ways their organizations engage meaningfully in pushing forward social justice and a more equitable world.

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AM I (UN) WELCOME HERE?

CONVERSATIONS WITH TRANS MEMBERS IN FRATERNITIES & SORORITIES ON CAMPUS

MEREDITH BIELASKA

When I first set out to begin my doctoral research three years ago, I never could have imagined how my life would be forever changed by my conversations with trans and non-binary students and how each story of their membership in fraternity/sorority life would come to highlight such a profound and meaningful, yet often undiscussed, part of our world.

As someone who has served as a campus-based fraternity/sorority advisor, a National Panhellenic Conference area advisor, and volunteers for my own inter/national sorority, I must admit that since becoming an alumnae member almost two decades ago, more and more of my conversations have revolved around policy and procedure rather than focusing on the actual student experience. Since my work often involves student leaders and organizations or communities as a whole, I have not often taken time to reflect on those individuals who such conversations would directly affect or impact. I intentionally chose to conduct a narrative research project to hear stories directly from individual members about their experience of being trans in fraternity/sorority life. After conducting interviews and pouring over journal contributions from participants across the United States, I felt it was important to share their stories and insights because they deserve an opportunity for their perspectives to be heard. Out of respect for their privacy, the identities of all individuals who have contributed to this article and the corresponding research have been changed.

Just because you say it doesn't mean you are trans-inclusive. It requires a lot of follow-up, and a lot of places are unfortunately very exclusive because of these things.

The compilation of excerpts provided here, and the related topics they represent, documents how many of the individuals in this research have shared similar stories or experiences in their lives, despite attending different colleges, in different regions of the United States, and being members of various organizations across umbrella councils or conferences. These shared experiences highlight a greater need for all of us, including campus-based professionals, headquarter staff, and local volunteers, to do more to engage and support our students and communities in active dialogue about inclusion and diversity.

Recruitment is intimidating. Navigating the experience of determining which organization on your campus could be the right fit for you as a student is challenging. However, currently there are no easily accessible materials for students (or even campus-based advisors) to assist students in undertaking this process which may also have layered questions regarding their acceptance for gender identity. This leaves students feeling isolated to navigate the process of choosing when and how to disclose their identity to members and being concerned over whether their peers will ultimately accept them. For Chase, the decision to join an organization meant finding one that would accept him from the start:

> *So, what I did is I reached out to the director of Greek life, and I had a meeting with him. I told him that I was transgender, and I wanted to find out if any fraternity would be ready to accept this into the chapter. He researched this by speaking with the presidents and vice-presidents, and he threw out the idea to them. He formed it into a training session that they had to go to; it was just to see if they would even take anyone. Then, he provided me with that information, so I knew which ones had open views on the idea.*

For others, they may take this risk and wait to inform members after they join. For Cory, the stress and anxiety of their fellow members not knowing caused them to eventually choose to disclose their identity during the new member process:

> *I had no family here; I had no close friends. This was my first week in school, and I needed a family. So, telling them, I was extremely scared. I honestly thought that they were going to just kick me out because there were instances in the past where groups turned people away since they felt like they weren't ready to handle that as a chapter. So, I spoke with the president at the time, and I asked him his honest opinion because if he felt that as a chapter, they weren't ready, then I was just not going to tell everyone. I just didn't wanna go through that. But he reassured me that everyone still loved and cared for me, so that I should just be open and tell them. And ultimately, that's what I did.*

While these stories highlight proactive steps individuals used to ultimately join and find acceptance, this research did not explore the experience for any students who may have faced potential rejection where defined pathways for confirming support would be available through their membership. This limited access or clarity leads to the next topic highlighted by participants regarding policies.

Having a policy alone does not lead to inclusion. Almost all the participants in the study mentioned that policy itself played no role in their membership experience, and many members (including themselves) did not know if their organization had any official policy on gender identity and membership. Only one individual did know about their organization's policy; however, when asked about it, they described it like this:

> *I recognize that even though my organization has a really great trans inclusion policy, for one reason or another, that never really trickled down to a lot of people, it had to be referred to by someone who knew about the codes. That in itself is a really big issue. Just because you say it doesn't mean you are trans-inclusive. It requires a lot of follow-up, and a lot of places are unfortunately very exclusive because of these things.*

For Taylor, the challenge of confirming if any organization in their community would be welcoming was difficult. Despite making attempts to determine if any organization had a policy, student leaders did not seem very knowledgeable. They described their recruitment experience like this:

> *So, I had my friends go check it out, and nobody could get a solid answer for the question of "Are trans people accepted?" For one of the organizations specifically, one of my friends had asked someone who was a fraternity member, "Hey, if I transitioned like tomorrow, and I then identified as a woman, would you still consider me a brother, and would you still consider me a part of this fraternity?" And this person could not give him an answer. The general response they kept receiving was, "Well, um, uh, you see, it depends," and that to me felt like, "Wow, so none of you would have my back, is what I know?"*

This highlights a more general understanding that policy alone will not influence more significant change in the practices of undergraduate students and to influence behavioral or cultural issues (including other topics such as membership selection, alcohol, risk, etc.), there needs to be regular ongoing peer engagement at the local levels to ensure the students not only understand the policies but also buy into the policy and are willing to enact them. In these students' experiences, the chapter leadership members either were the only ones aware of the policy or did not seem to know if or how to interpret policy and its impact on whether a student could become or stay a member based on gender identity. In some cases, the whole chapter was supportive of the individual's membership and being a part of the organization regardless of an existing policy or not. This may not be true for all chapters and campuses and leads to the next topic from our participants regarding more extensive conversations regarding general acceptance and how individuals are welcomed at national programs, conventions, or alumni events where different viewpoints may collide.

Microaggressions hurt more coming from your fellow members and peers. All participants acknowledged they might be the only current individual identified as trans, non-

binary, queer, or simply non-cisgender in their community for their chapters and their communities. As we discussed how they felt supported within the community and their organizations, they were quick to provide several examples of how the active chapters and their leadership helped them and engaged in anything they might need throughout their experience. However, when the conversation changed to the larger organization or the community, participants acknowledged there were still opportunities for dialogue and education as ignorance, intolerance, and narrow-mindedness are still present in their experience.

Taylor expressed one experience of a significant centennial event hosted by their sorority, in which many alumnae members were present. During that event, they had an exchange with one particular alumna that they described like this:

This woman came up to me, and I'd never met her in my life. She was like, "I just wanna let you know that I'm so proud of you and everything that you represent, the sorority needed you, and you were there." I was like, "Haha, thanks, lady." However, she continued rambling for a little bit and said, "You know, at first, I wasn't accepting of you, I didn't think that you fit in here, and I didn't want you to join, and I was against you. But now I see. You've changed me; you've allowed me to see like you're such an amazing person." So, it took me a while, but it was such a backhanded compliment to know someone who I had never met had this idea of me, and it made me a lot more aware that I'm connected to women across the world, and similarly, they're all connected to me. It was at that moment when I just felt like 1,000 eyes were on me and that some people just might not agree with me being in the sorority. It made me aware that although my chapter might be very progressive and they all love me, that there are some people in the world who don't believe that trans people should be in sororities.

Since some of the research participants had not experienced fraternity/sorority life beyond their campus, they were unsure how their membership would be welcomed beyond that immediate community. However, within their communities, many expressed the desire to make a more considerable impact by encouraging education and dialogue not just on gender identity but on various issues related to inclusion and diversity. For many participants, their awareness of their needs and experiences has increased their understanding of what others in the community may also be facing that is not a focus of their organizations. This dialogue about the current limitations of such efforts leads to the next topic regarding inclusion efforts, both on campus and for organizations.

Be intentional about your inclusion efforts. Although this was not specifically part of the research, many participants discussed the general discomfort with the various ways in which fraternities and sororities have traditional societal gendered experiences that challenge them and their sense of gender identity. This was especially true for organizations that adjusted policy to allow non-binary members but did not thoroughly consider or adjust the experience to review their programming, terminology, and other aspects of their membership. Participants often remarked how such daily reminders in their experience were continual hints at how the organization had not taken the time to acknowledge the various ways gender still played a daily role in the organization and challenging these norms made them feel uncomfortable. Here are just a few of the responses from our participants when asked about their general experiences:

It might not seem like it, but there's a lot of things that sororities do that are trans exclusive. Things like dress codes can be very exclusive and socially performative. Some events might be very exclusive, and something as simple as a karaoke night can really push away members if it makes them feel alienated or isolated from the group. And just because your headquarters has a very progressive stance, it does not mean that people follow them.

Until I said something, every word in the IFC constitution that had a gendered option was male. Why is it like that? We are not even the only gender-inclusive chapter in IFC. So why does everything say "he" and "brother?" They corrected it when I said something about it, but I think it gets to a point where people don't always know what the problem is unless it's pointed out to them.

Why are there so many gendered rush events? Eating wings, watching football, cookie decorating, crafting. I don't get it. I don't get the idea of every fraternity having a sister sorority group. I don't get that at all. It doesn't make sense to me. I feel like a lot of the things our community does are just very like straight, cisgender people things.

I don't understand why Panhellenic can decide for my organization if someone like me should get to be a member or not. I don't think their recruitment policy is inclusive at all. It has such a narrow view of what it means to be in a sorority. I love my sisters and am thankful every day for being a part of my organization, but I don't get how one group can define what membership means for another.

Being in the sorority, I started having to see myself as different. It really put a magnifying glass on being trans because all of a sudden, people were asking me if I felt, "Okay." Like, "Oh, was this language okay, like, you're — you're the trans person, is this right to say? How do you think we should address you? When we're trying to look for new members, are you okay being called a sister?"

While these experiences highlighted how members felt singled out within the larger group, there were also many times they highlighted positive experiences where being in their organization provided them with a supportive network in challenging times. As a closure to each interview, the participants were invited to share their advice with other trans or non-binary students who may be considering fraternity/sorority life on their campus. These thoughts provide the final insight regarding their membership within our communities.

Don't be afraid to find what is right for you. When offered the opportunity to give any recommendations or words of advice to their fellow peers in the trans community, many of the participants overwhelmingly encouraged students to still consider fraternity/sorority life when looking for ways to find a connection on campus. They also encouraged organizations and chapters with trans or non-binary members to be more open about such inclusion because larger representation within the community matters. They also expressed a desire for more connection with one another, to provide direct support and advice to members who may otherwise not have anyone to discuss a shared experience with on their campus. Below are just a few examples of some of the thoughts that have been shared:

I would say that no matter how skeptical or judgmental you think an organization is or how much you think you will not be accepted and loved, that every organization is different, and if you have had a bad situation with one organization, that there are other ones out there. There are different personalities. There are different organizational philosophies. If joining is truly something that you want to do, there is more than enough support out there. You just have to follow your gut and choose the right one.

We're paving the way, and we're fighting for you. I wish that we had more support for them. I wish there were a way we could talk to trans members on other campuses as a support group, or at least provide a network for them. But we exist, and we thrive, and we're just as good as everybody else. If I could do it, you definitely could too.

If I had to give advice, I would say it's okay to say no to things. I think I would say that even to a non-trans person. If you get a bid and you accept it, and you start pledging, and they're asking you to do things you don't want to do, just say no. And if they can't respect that, then maybe you shouldn't be with them. Maybe they're not the people you need to be with. It's an unhealthy group.

Participants often remarked how such daily reminders in their experience were continual hints at how the organization had not taken the time to acknowledge the various ways gender still played a daily role in the organization and challenging these norms made them feel uncomfortable.

As colleges and universities continue to encourage social connection as a way for all students to find their sense of belonging and establish affinity within cohorts and communities, it is vital we regularly evaluate our place in providing a space for students to find kinship through fraternity/sorority life. However, as was outlined above, this effort needs to be more intentional and transparent if our organizations want to provide a more welcoming environment for trans or non-binary members. As we all continually evolve and change, both as individuals and as a profession, I hope we all take some time to reflect and learn from each other about how to best take steps toward broader inclusivity and supporting our communities.

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